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Aspects of Quantification in Serbian and Dutch

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Aspects of Quantification in Serbian and Dutch



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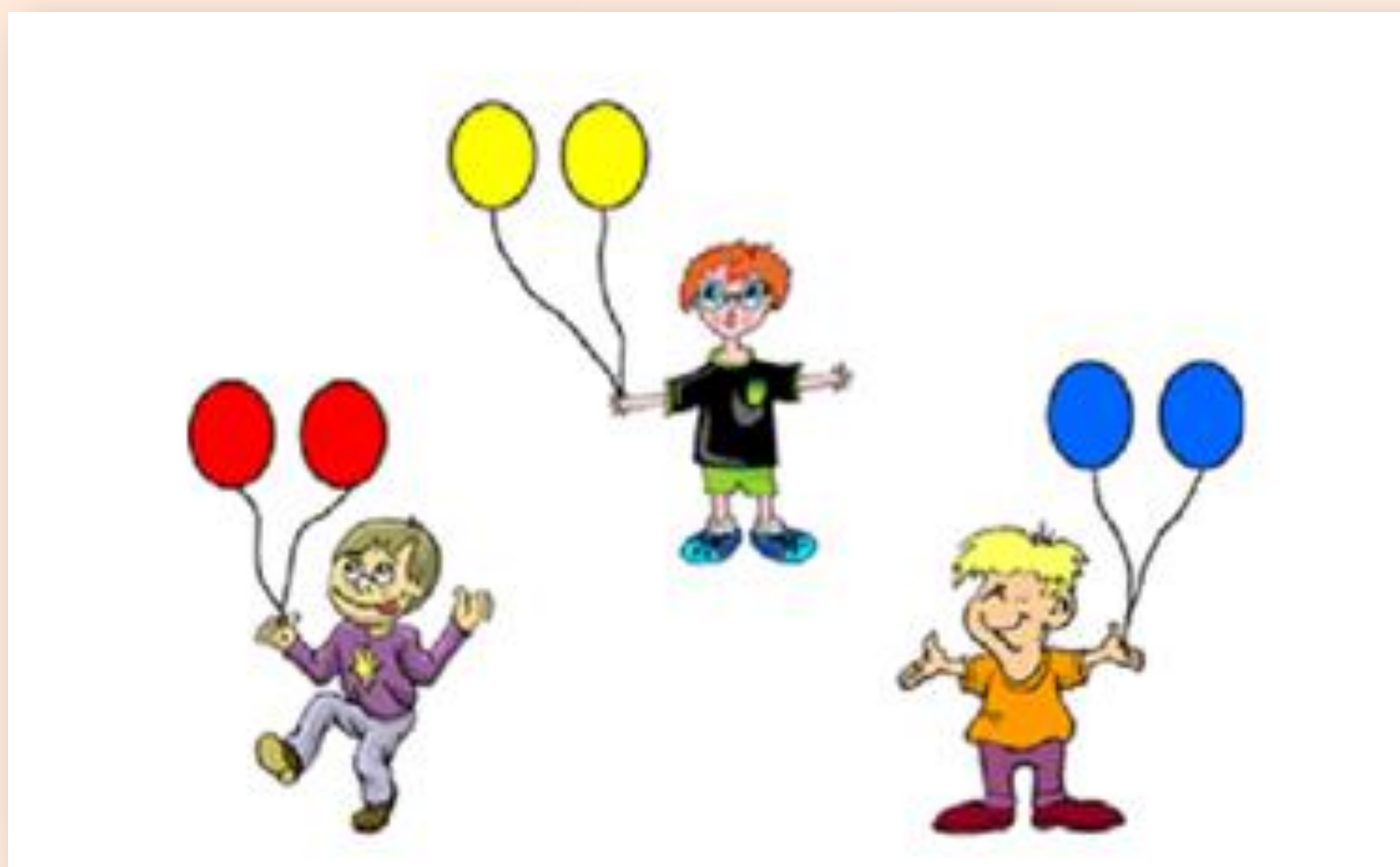


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Introduction

Two numerically quantified NPs in a sentence can have at least two possible interpretations: **distributive** and **collective readings**.

1) Three boys are holding two balloons.



a. Distributive interpretation

Children, up to the age of 5, show surprising differences in the interpretation of numerically quantified NPs. For instance, with the sentence (1), children prefer the distributive (a)



b. Collective interpretation

Adults, on the other hand, prefer the collective interpretation (b) (Musolino, 2009; Syrett and Musolino, 2013)

Goals

Which factors influence children's acquisition of collective readings and what drives their preference towards distributivity? How does morpho-syntax influence the acquisition timeline?



Dutch and Serbian are extremes of **morpho-syntactic marking** of quantificational readings. Dutch has minimal marking (3), while Serbian has an intricate system which gives more variables to research (different types of numerals, each of which has a specific way of interacting with gender and subject-verb agreement (4)):

- 3) Twee kinderen wassen een boot.
Two child.nom.PL wash.PL a boat.acc.sg
"Two children are washing a boat"
(either jointly or each separately)
- 4) a. Dvoje dece pere brod.
Two.MixGender child.gen.PL wash.SG boat.acc.sg
"Two children are washing a boat" (jointly)
b. Dvoje dece peru brod.
Two.MixGender child.gen.PL wash.PL boat.acc.sg
"Two children are washing a boat" (each separately)

Pilot Study

Although there is research on distributive markers in Serbian by Knežević (in prep), the role of **morpho-syntax in acquisition** of distributivity remains unclear. The hypothesis is that singular agreement yields collective, and plural distributive interpretation.

Therefore, a pilot study was created, for which it was expected that:

- Both singular and plural verbal agreement would have **high, and equal, ratings** for mixed gender numerals and NPs.
- Singular verbal agreement would have very **low ratings** for both feminine and masculine numerals and NPs.

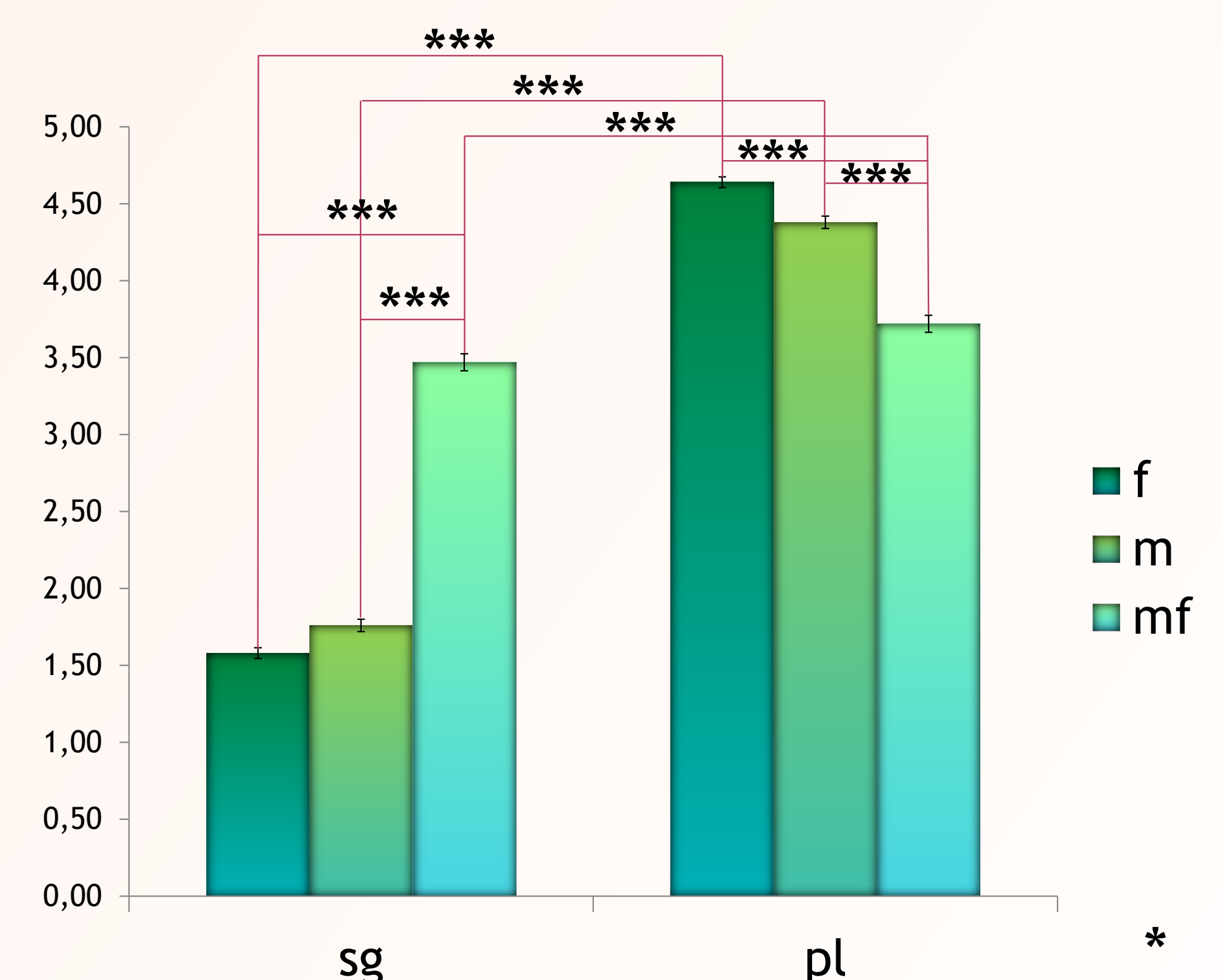
Results

❖ 106 Serbian adults (mean age: 25.9) were asked to give 5-point Likert scale ratings on the naturalness of sentences with numerically quantified NPs in present tense.

❖ The factors tested were the influence of **Number** (singular and plural verbal agreement) and **Gender** (feminine, masculine and mixed gender different types of numerals)

❖ 2x3 study, 30 items x 6 lists, balanced design

❖ Using mixed effect linear models, paired tests showed that **all interactions were significant** ($p < 0.02$).



❖ Unexpectedly, ratings for mixed gender NPs were not as high as expected for neither singular nor plural, yet the difference between the two is not as drastic as it is with feminine and masculine NPs.

❖ It was confirmed that ratings for singular verbal agreement are lower than for plural and mixed gender.

❖ The follow-up experiment will show if there are differences if the verb is in the past tense.

References

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